

# Jonathan Zittrain: Ukrainian web-sites should be integrated with the international web-sites.

It would be very useful to witness the combination of the local web-sites with the international web-sites. Then it would be not that easy for the government to close the web-site, if some problems occur.

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*Previously, he was Professor of Internet Governance and Regulation at Oxford University and a principal of the Oxford Internet Institute.*

*Zittrain's research interests include battles for control of digital property and content, cryptography, electronic privacy, the roles of the intermediaries within Internet architecture.*

*In 2002 he has performed the first large-scale tests of Internet filtering in China and Saudi Arabia, and as part of the Open Net Initiative; he has coedited studies of Internet filtering by national governments.*

*"Ukrainska Pravda" communicated with the author of the popular book "The future of the Internet" and spoke about the prospects and dangers of the internet development in Ukraine, as well as in the world.*

**- Mr. Zittrain, what was the purpose of your travel to Ukraine?**

- I am hoping to learn more about the status of the internet in Ukraine, and to find out how it's used here.

**- How well are you aware of the situation of the internet freedom in Ukraine?**

- I am a member of the group, called "open internet initiative". And we are exploring the state of the Internet and the efforts to introduce internet censorship and filtering in almost 50 countries of the world.

We have drafted a report on every Post-Soviet country, some of these reports are really outdated – they were written 3 years ago.

**- What are the main tendencies of the internet development in the world, particularly, what is the condition of the internet usage in different countries?**

- One question that arises here is how we can provide access to the internet for people. Either they will have it at home, at work, or at the internet-café, or in the public library.

In Ukraine it's a general tendency that primarily students, people who live in big cities have access to the internet, and also it can be possible to have access to the internet through mobile connection.

The other question is, if you already have access to the internet, how free this access can be.

We know that the quality of the internet connection is similar all over the world. But here we can notice some limitations in its usage, - for example, if you have access to the internet, you might not have access to some web-sites or some web-sites can even be blocked. There could be some limitations in using these or those products and the government can trace the web-sites, opened by a person.

**- How can you comment the situation on the internet freedom in Ukraine?**

- As far as we are aware, there isn't any regular and thorough control of internet users in Ukraine as compared to China, Saudi Arabia and Cuba.

**- Have you ever heard about the draft law, submitted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to Verhovna Rada, which states that informational agencies will have to pay fine, if they are not registered and they release some informational product?**

- Yes. Requirements for getting a license or registration can become the first step forward in introducing censorship. Although, at first, it looks like a neutral step, like a neutral action.

**- The activity of internet publications is not regulated by any law in Ukraine. The majority of online publications, which operate as information agencies, are not registered due to the absence of legislation.**

- In general, the initiatives on regulating these activities can be the way to solve some problems.

One of the advantages of the internet, one of its attractive features is that people can create their own web-site, they can persuade other people in their own opinions and they can make their own content, without any license or registration.

**- Could you give us an example of another country, where the situation would develop in the similar scenario like we had during our political events in Ukraine? How did the assault on the internet freedom take place in the world?**

- There can be at least two models. The government starts to panic during the crisis, fearing that new technologies, provided by the internet, can help the opposition to mobilize its forces.

Speaking about the Orange revolution, as far as we understand, internet didn't play such a crucial role here. But if we combine the possibilities of the mobile phones, independent media and internet...In 2005 the government of one of the countries tried to block sending text messages and overall to stop the exchange of the information, not approved by the government.

The second model is used not during crisis, but rather for exerting permanent control. And in this case, we don't see any attempts to stop or hinder sending text messages.

Still, the government has a certain list of the web-sites, which are considered to be unwanted, and access to these web-sites can be banned or limited.

**- How can the government identify that the assault on the internet has started?**

- In order to introduce censorship based on the other model, it's necessary to have a specialized infrastructure of the internet, when access to a certain country should be effected through one or two portals.

Saudi Arabia serves as an example here, as the majority of computers can get access to the internet the same way as the workstation can get access to the internet in the Company. It operates as if computer is located in another Company, and Company managers decide what access type they will be providing for it.

**- So, there is a certain list of web-sites, whose access can be prohibited?**

- It means, that everything is allowed, except for....As compared to the "white list" – list of permitted web-sites, there is also a "black list" of prohibited web-sites.

But such a structure, when all the data, all the information is streamed through the government control portal, can only slightly filter the information.

In many other places, including China, there is a larger number of such control portals, since if the government needs to filter the information, it should also have some influence on the internet-providers.

**- How can we identify the "landmark", which should not be trespassed by the government in its efforts to control the internet? Where is this "point of no return", to your mind?**

- The internet has such a peculiarity, that if, for example, on Monday you had access to everything, to all the information, suddenly on Tuesday it turns out that lots of information is blocked.

And let's say, on Tuesday everything was blocked, while on Wednesday, you'll have free access to many things again.

If we speak about point of no return, then we shouldn't speak about the technical side of the matter. Here it's more about point of no return in the political or cultural sense.

If, for example, the government insists on the necessity to introduce the content filter for the sake of national security or for combating pornography, as soon as the filter is introduced, later on it would be very difficult to tell the government, that now we have resolved our security issues, so let's not use internet filters any more.

That's why we speak about competition between the internet users and content providers, who do care for the free communication and aim at a larger percentage of people, who could have access to the internet.

This competition happens despite the intent of the government to control the information flow, as well as to control of the content. But now the internet is not a priority, as the majority of people in the world, including people in Ukraine, are still getting news not through the internet.

That's why we can speak here about the importance of mass media, based only on the internet.

**- What will be the best behavior model for the Ukrainian internet community, who doesn't want to lose the freedom in the internet? Are there any effective means to oppose the government's intentions to take internet over its control?**

- One of the ways to do so is to integrate Ukrainian local internet community with internet communities in other places. This integration is meant here on the technical level, we speak about world organizations, which operate using internet-protocol.

It's quite natural, that Ukraine, which is one of the powerful centers of informational technologies during the Soviet Union times, can technically integrate into the world internet-community. It's what concerns the technical level.

The second level concerns the content and activity.

It would be quite useful to see the combination of the local web-sites with the international web-sites. In this case it would be not that easy for the government to close the web-site, if any problems occur.

**- Can you see now in Ukraine any dangers for freedom of the internet or any attempts to control the internet?**

- We haven't seen any signs of technical control so far, for example, blockage of the web-sites. But we are aware, that there might be some limitations in communication, and sometimes these actions are explained by following the law on the protection of private life, or by the law of combating gossips or rumours.

Or sometimes, we have a very complicated bureaucratic system in getting a license or registration, which makes it difficult to speak one's mind freely, without any control.

**- How can you comment the situation with the internet freedom in Russia? Many people compare new Ukrainian government with Russian government, and there are some agitations in the society, that the Ukrainian government will inherit lots of Russian methods. As far as we know, internet in Russia became one of the ways to get heard by the Russian government.**

- There is hope that political atmosphere and the environment can still allow the society to protest, if the society and community would experience pressure from the government, or if the government would like to apply any limitations.

Especially, if this blockage or limitations can be characterized as those copied from Russia, or made from the Russian sample.

On the technical level it would be very useful to see lots of connections, which pass through Ukraine, through Russia, and many other countries as well. These connections are not a gas pipeline: Russia wanted to turn off the tap – and the connection is over, that won't work.

**- Are there any limitations of the internet freedom in Russia, which can provoke turning off this tap?**

- I think I could answer this question after I communicate with the internet-providers here in Ukraine.

**- But anyway, what do you think, how can internet influence the government, especially through the blogs?**

- While the government needs support from the society, and blogs are the place and means of expressing personal opinions about the government, they also reflect the extent of support of the society towards the government.

They are not miracles. But we have witnessed that blogs can become a source of additional powerful voices of people, who don't represent the government, and who are not powerful in the traditional sense.

**- Now I would like to ask a question about the situation in the USA. I would like to know your opinion as to the web-site WikiLeaks and the publication of the secret "Afghanistan dossier". What do you think, why did the U.S. government has negatively perceived these documents, and has not done anything to this web-site?**

- I think this happened because of the two reasons. The first reason – understanding that according to the American Constitution, any attempt to stop the journalists or any other representatives of the society from announcing National Security Information – can be very difficult.

There was one case, around 40 years ago, when one newspaper - New York Times – wanted to make National Security Information public – it was the history of the Vietnamese War, and the government ordered to stop them.

But then other newspapers started to do this (they published this information), when the first material wasn't released. In the long run, The Supreme Court of the USA decided that the newspapers can publish this information. Thus, there are also some legal limitations in following the law of the freedom of speech.

The second reason is technical. There is such a risk in the internet environment that when you close one source of information, a thousand more will pop up. This situation made the powerful American government conduct negotiations with WikiLeaks, asking them not to make the information public any more.

**- What are the general tendencies in fighting for the copyrights in the internet? I don't mean milding or intensifying these requirements, only following copyright requirements for releasing information in the internet?**

- Traditionally many publishers depended on a small number of sources for disseminating their information and for making their profit.

Thanks to the internet, the information spread very quickly, and the publishers had the same scenario as the American government had with the WikiLeaks web-site. They were actually looking for the new ways to limit the dissemination of their information.

While other publishers changed their business, and earned their profit on the excessive volumes of information, placed in the internet. For example, for placing advertisements at their web-sites.

New technologies can introduce new limitations on the information, making it more usual to buy the information, rather than copy it. But it's still early to talk about that.

**- So do you think in the future it would be more perspective to purchase the information?**

- It's possible, although we are getting more free information in the internet day after day. But here's a question about generating new content by those people, like Wikipedia.

**- What role will the internet play in the future?**

- I think the answer to this question can be reflected in three stages. At the first stage we had cheap computers. Even your coffee-maker is a smart machine. The second stage – cheap networks. And we mean internet revolution here.

And the third stage – cheap sensors – cameras, microphones. Any event, which takes place in the public, is hard to conceal. That's not because the government controls the process, although this might happen too, but because everybody witnesses the event.

So if something happens – 50 mobile phones can record the event and pass the message on the event through the internet almost live. This can actually change the internet today.

**- Do you think the development of internet and television can be perspective?**

- Many specialists, especially those from the TV world, are moving from being just the owners of the limited information to providing people with large amounts of information. They look at the internet as at one more source to distribute the information and offer their material.

But the question is really interesting. How can the internet change television? In fact, television is a one, thoroughly made program, sent to everyone. And its future can be a computer game with a numerous number of players.

**- What is the future of the news publications? Do you think they could stop their existence?**

- The news means information and not ink. And we don't know if people are ready to pay for the high-quality news.

I am not a pessimist. Those people, who come to the public square and announce logos in fighting for freedom, can actually pay for high-quality news or story, they think are useful for them.

*The interview was conducted under support of the press-service of the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine.*